

Daria Dorota Pikulska

## The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław

The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław is the only museum institution in Poland dedicated entirely to the history of architecture. It was founded in 1965 as part of the City Museum of Wrocław and operated as The Museum of Architecture and Reconstruction. Since 1971 it has functioned independently as the Museum of Architecture. The museum's founder and its director until the year 2000 was Olgierd Czerner, who was also chief conservator of city monuments and later professor at the Polytechnic School.

The museum is housed in the historical complex of a former Bernardine monastery dating back to the second half of the 15th and the beginning of 16th century. The buildings sustained heavy damage during the Second World War and were in ruins until reconstruction began in the 1960s. When reconstruction was complete in 1974, the museum acquired its main exhibition space in the Gothic interior of the former church.



Figure 1: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, bird's-eye view, 1997

The present character of the museum is still largely defined by its original purpose as The Museum of Architecture and Reconstruction. Its main task was to collect the historical elements and details of destroyed buildings, especially during the reconstruction of Wrocław's old city center. Gathered items were then inventoried and stored, and the most valuable of them, including 12th century stone elements from a demolished Benedictine Abbey, were displayed in the museum's permanent exhibition, creating the space of our Romanesque Room that still exists today. This presentation was kept not only as an important display of medieval art and culture, but also as an evidence of a part that interpretation of medieval history played in constructing the identity of a city that changed its whole population after the Second World War.



Figure 2: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, interior of the former church, 2000

### Renovation and extension

The reconstructed Gothic monastery that houses the museum is of significant historical value in itself. The building's maintenance and ensuring public access to it are key aims of our institution. Nevertheless, a solution to the museum's lack of modern exhibition space has become necessary. To that end our institution organized an international competition in 2005 to create a design for the renovation of the existing buildings and the construction of an addition to the museum. Unfortunately, since then, realisation of this plan has proved impossible due to legal complications. Still, the renovation and extension of the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław remains one of our highest priorities, albeit according to a new design.

### Expanding the collection

From the time of its founding, collecting has been part of the museum's activity. Because the museum is financed by the city of Wrocław, emphasis has been placed on items connected with the architecture of Wrocław and the Silesian region. The scant financial means at our disposal allow for only very occasional purchases. Every time an item of particular interest to our collection appears on the market, we have to search for special funding. Most of our acquisitions are made in conjunction with partnerships with architectural offices, donations, and taking over the legacy of selected architects. In addition to architectural plans, drawings, documents and photographs, the museum also has interesting examples of craft and one of the biggest Polish collections of stained glass. As many other museums of this type, we have also assumed that architecture is closely related to other branches of art, and also have a department of contemporary art. Its collection of design, paintings and graphics represents mainly geometrical abstraction, with its most prominent Polish representatives, Henryk Stażewski or Maria Jarema. Nowadays however, the museum focuses strictly on the problems of architecture and the contemporary art collection is treated as a closed entirety.

In Poland and elsewhere, recent years have seen an increase in new centers that exist to promote and better the understanding of contemporary architecture.



While we cooperate with them, we also embrace our mission to spread knowledge of architecture's old, as well as recent, history. Our focus continues to be on building tradition in Wrocław, both by preparing exhibitions and by collaborating with the municipality of Wrocław to protect and revitalize the architectural heritage of the city. For example, the comprehensive book on the *WuWA* exhibition (*Wohnung und Werkraum Ausstellung*) published by the museum influenced to some extent the decision to restore this unique complex.

### A new director, a new subject

Jerzy Ilkosz took over the position of museum director when Olgierd Czerner retired in 2000. At that time, in addition to Polish contemporary architecture, one of Ilkosz's own interests was incorporated into the exhibition program: research on and presentation of Wrocław Modernism. While in the past research on the inheritance of German architecture in Wrocław had been stifled by censorship, the political transformation in Poland now encouraged it. A succession of exhibitions was organized, for the first time showing works by such eminent architects like Hans Poelzig,

Max Berg, Heinrich Lauterbach and many others. Items from our collection were also presented at the large exhibitions organized by the Deutsche Architektur Museum in Frankfurt am Main, as well as others in Paris, London, Barcelona and other European centres.

### Digitisation of the Construction Archive

The year 2000 also saw the museum co-opt a huge collection from the former Construction Archive of Wrocław. Its over 150,000 plans and drawings of building activity in the city from the beginning of the 1800s to 1945 were entrusted to the museum's new department, and the Department of 19th and 20th Century Wrocław Architecture was also established. Because the Construction Archive is not only an important historical collection, but also a practical resource, it was decided to digitise the material. In 2010 with the help of European Union funding, we acquired the state-of-the-art Cruse scanner and developed a specialised database system allowing for storage of the digital material and public access via the website. The digitisation program is carried out by our team working with an external IT company. To date, over 40,000 archival items have been digitised and described while the whole repertory should be accessible to the public on our website in a few years time.

### Using technology to continue tradition

As we prepare presentations, we continue to try to be true to the principle of showing as much original material as possible. Recently, with new technological possibilities and modern designing tools employed by architects, exhibitions devoted to architecture often largely consist of multimedia. Our institution would still like to be a place that offers the public the opportunity to experience authentic artefacts. At the same time, a significant part of our work is to publish the most comprehensive catalog possible for each exhibition.

### Museum departments and responsibilities

Several specialized departments within the museum carry out the tasks of acquisition, scientific description and making the collection available. The Medieval Department stores mainly stone details, and



Figure 3: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, Romanesque Room, 2002

among them some of the oldest sculptured elements in Wrocław and Poland. The Department of Modern Architecture collects Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque objects, including graphics, stone elements, stained glass, architectural ceramics, or etchings. The Departments of the 19th and 20th Century Architecture and of Contemporary Architecture hold the works of over 80 leading Polish architects including Romuald Gutt, Jerzy Hryniewiecki, Wacław Krzyżanowski, Jan Koszczyc-Witkiewicz, Bohdan Lachert and Józef Szanajca, Tadeusz Michejda, Maciej Nowicki (considered the greatest Polish architect of 20th century), Bohdan Pniewski, Helena and Szymon Syrkus, Jerzy Sołtan (the student of Le Corbusier), Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, or Kazimierz Wejchert. The museum also possesses works by significant international architects, like Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, Kisho Kurokawa, Richard England. This collection serves both Polish and international researchers. It is also the basis for numerous exhibitions and publications prepared by the museum. Over the years, the museum has published the monographs of architects such as Romuald Gutt, Bohdan Lachert and Józef Szanajca, Tadeusz Brzoza, Jan Głuszak, Stefan Müller. There is also a Photography Department that not only collects historical items, but also routinely makes its own documentation of building activity in the city.

In total the museum employs over 50 people, including 15 persons working with the collection or organizing exhibitions and 16 persons in Construction Archive.

### Financing

The museum is solely financed by the municipality of Wrocław. The greatest part of these funds is consumed by the maintenance of the museum building and employee costs. In spite of that, since its opening, the museum has presented over 600 temporary exhibitions devoted to the history of architecture and its contemporary development, in-house, throughout Poland and abroad. Presentations on historical architecture have included for example *The Architecture of Faras*, *Old Russian Architecture*, *Dresden Baroque*, *Zakopane Style in Architecture*, *Architectural competitions in Poland 1918–1939*, and the monographic

exhibitions of Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier, Kenzo Tange, Alvaro Siza, Erich Mendelsohn, or Ernst May. Exhibitions prepared by the museum were presented among others in West Berlin, Dresden, Hannover, Moscow, Lyon, Coventry and London. In 1981 the exhibition titled *Polish Avant-garde – Architecture and City Planning* was presented in the Centre George Pompidou in Paris. Our exhibition devoted to skyscrapers designed for Wrocław by Max Berg was presented in Braunschweig and Munich. The monographic exhibition of Hans Poelzig was shown in Düsseldorf, Dresden and Görlitz. In 2005, when the Max Berg Centennial Hall in Wrocław was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we prepared the monographic exhibition with a catalog in Polish, English and German. All of the mentioned exhibitions were accompanied by comprehensive catalogs as well.

Presently the museum shows over 20 different exhibitions each year (25 in 2011, 24 in 2012, even 31 in 2013!). Some of these were also shown in other places in Poland and abroad. Apart from that, the mu-



Figure 4: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, the western cloister, ca. 2002



seum also cooperates with other institutions and regularly hosts their exhibitions. External financing is almost always necessary for these temporary exhibitions, very often in the form of grants from the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and occasionally from international organizations and foundations. However, different to other countries, Polish legal procedures do not favour private and company sponsoring or financing.

### Museum programs

The museum realises programmes and events addressed to professional architects, historians, and the general public. To mention two of these cycles: the *Gallery of One Project* is a monthly meeting devoted to the discussion of one important project currently in its realisation phase; *Archi-box. Alternative search space* invites the youngest generation of architects to construct installations explaining their methods and philosophy of work.

In 2009 the Department of Education was reorganized and began to play an important part in the museum's

activities, regularly preparing museum lessons, workshops, lectures and other events for children, adults and seniors. Some are connected with current temporary expositions, and some are devoted to more general questions of architecture, design, or other related subjects. Last year, for example, there was a cycle of activities concerning garden planning called *The Magic of the Gardens* that was awarded the title Historical Event of the Year 2013 in Poland. In 2010 the cycle for children titled *Architecture around us* was awarded the prize in the ministerial Competition for Museum Event of the Year Sybilla. *Architecture in the box* is a learning kit about architectural styles for teachers. It will be ready for loan to different schools later this year. A game about the preservation of historical monuments with a tablet application is another project called *Crazy Conservator*.

The museum promotes and encourages the use of its website, which is presently being modernised. In addition to educational materials, e-learning, games for children and so on, it will be equipped with audio-description allowing for its use by the visually impaired.



Figure 5: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, the cloister garth, 2005

The modernization of the website will also facilitate the use of the digitised collection of the Construction Archive.

Our museum offers the largest exhibition space in Wrocław, and so on occasion we host exhibitions from other city cultural institutions. Since July to November 2014 we have hosted a huge exhibition of Spanish art. After that, we will be showing a presentation of Alessandro Mendini and his design. The Museum of Architecture will play an active part in events in 2016 when Wrocław is the European Capital of Culture. The goal there is to increase general participation in cultural events. We plan to prepare a large exhibition on 20th century architecture in Wrocław. We would also like to continue a tradition of our museum and organize the third edition of *The Exhibition of Intentional Architecture TERRA*. The first two editions that took place in 1975 and 1981 became somewhat legendary among Polish architects. We have the ambition and hope to create another chapter of this legend.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Małachowicz, *Zespół pobernardyński*, Warszawa 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Agnieszka Gola, Magda Ławicka, *Od klasztoru do muzeum. Dzieje zespołu zabudowań bernardyńskich we Wrocławiu*, Wrocław 2009.

## Figures

Fig. 1: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, bird's-eye view, 1997, photo: Krzysztof Mazur

Fig. 2: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, interior of the former church, 2000, photo: Krzysztof Mazur

Fig. 3: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, Romanesque Room, 2002, photo: Waldemar Borski

Fig. 4: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, the western cloister, ca. 2002, photo: Waldemar Borski

Fig. 5: The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, the garth, 2005, photo: Mirosław Łanowiecki

## Abstract

The Museum of Architecture in Wrocław is the only museum institution in Poland dedicated to the history of architecture. Founded in 1965, it is housed in a Gothic monastery whose history plays a large part in defining the character of the museum. While its historical setting is accessible to the public, it lacks a modern exhibition space, creating the need for a newly constructed addition to the building. The museum is financed by the city of Wrocław, and therefore mainly collects items connected with local architecture. In 2000, over 150,000 plans from the former Construction Archive were co-opted and in 2010 digitisation of these items commenced. Several departments handle acquisition and item description. The museum employs over 50 people and presents over 20 exhibitions each year. The exhibitions are partly financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and by other institutions, but support by private or corporate sponsors is rare. The museum produces programmes and events addressed to professional architects, historians and to the general public. The Department of Education plays an important part, preparing workshops, lectures and other events. The modernised museum website will soon make the collection available online and facilitate e-learning.

## Author

Daria Dorota Pikulska studied Art History at the University of Wrocław from 1993 to 2002. During her studies from 1996 to 1999, she was involved in the Silesian Monument Inventory Project, a joint project of the Institute of Art History at the University of Wrocław

and the Bildarchiv Foto Marburg funded by the Volkswagen Foundation. She started working for the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław in 2003. Since 2013 she has been organizing exhibitions for the museum's International Cooperation and Exhibition Planning Department. Since 2014 she has also been working at the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture Department.

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